



Mike

Each day Mike Petty shares
Cambridgeshire's heritage on
Fenland History on Facebook



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About

Fenland History on Facebook is a group hosed by Mike Petty that shares and seeks information about the Cambridgeshire fens, past and present. W... See More

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ONLINE LIVE PRESENTATION
CHRISTMAS SPECIAL
HEREWARD THE WAKE

MIKE PETTY
"HEREWARD & OTHER FIGHTERS"
Tuesday 29th December 7.30pm (UK)
Obtain Link at:
Facebook.com/Groups/HerewardTheWake

PRESENTING
Historian & Researcher
Mike Petty delivers a
presentation analysing
Ely as a base for
rebellion and defence
Putting the Hereward
Stand at Ely into context

WAKEHEREWARD
PROJECT
PROMOTING HEREWARD
LOCALLY & GLOBALLY
SINCE 2013

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15



Anthony Shaw
7 mutual friends

Message



Roy Knight
3 mutual friends

Message



Les Rutterford
26 mutual friends

Message



James Fentiger
7 mutual friends

Message



Steve Chapman
2 mutual friends

Message



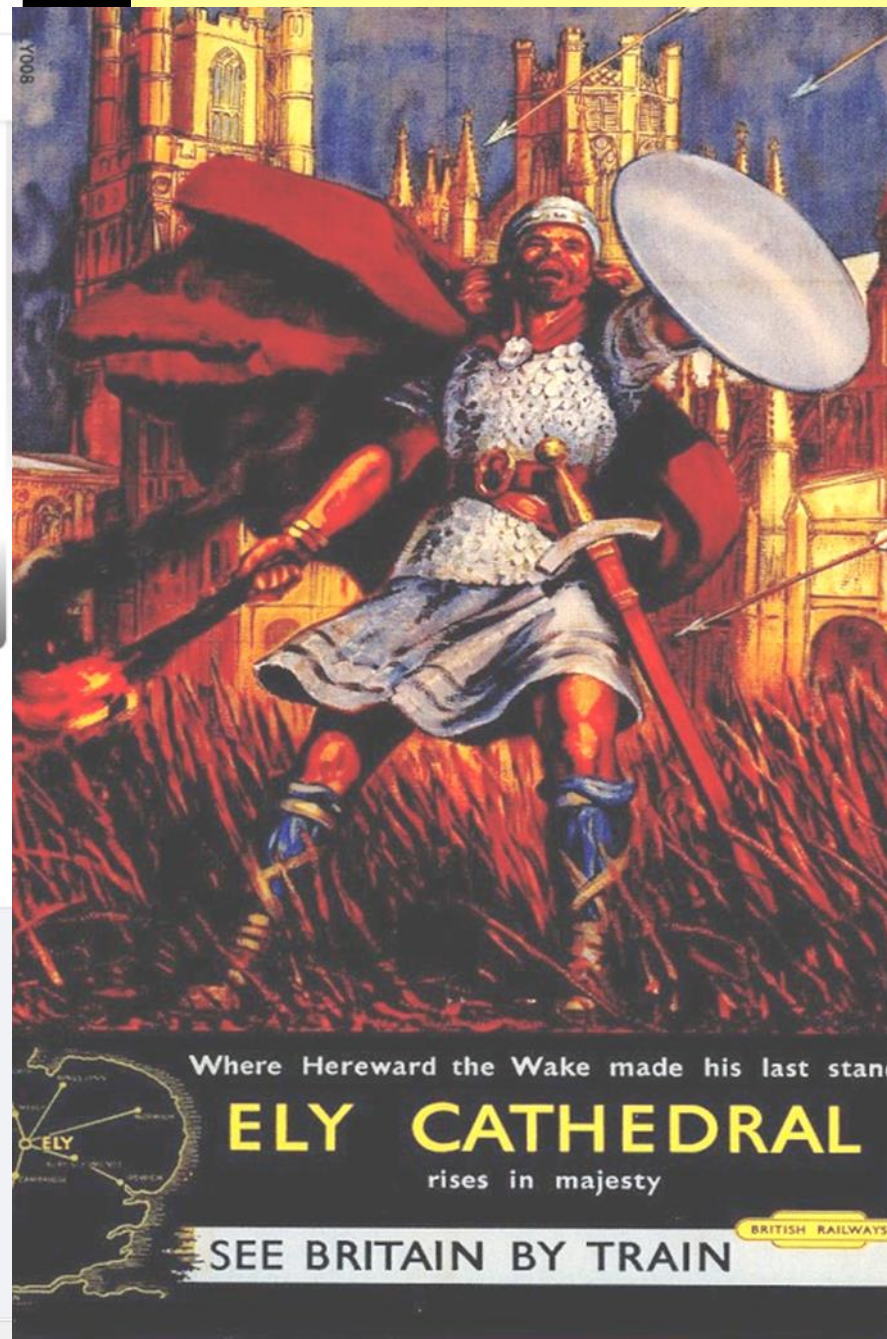
Roger Cork
7 mutual friends

Message



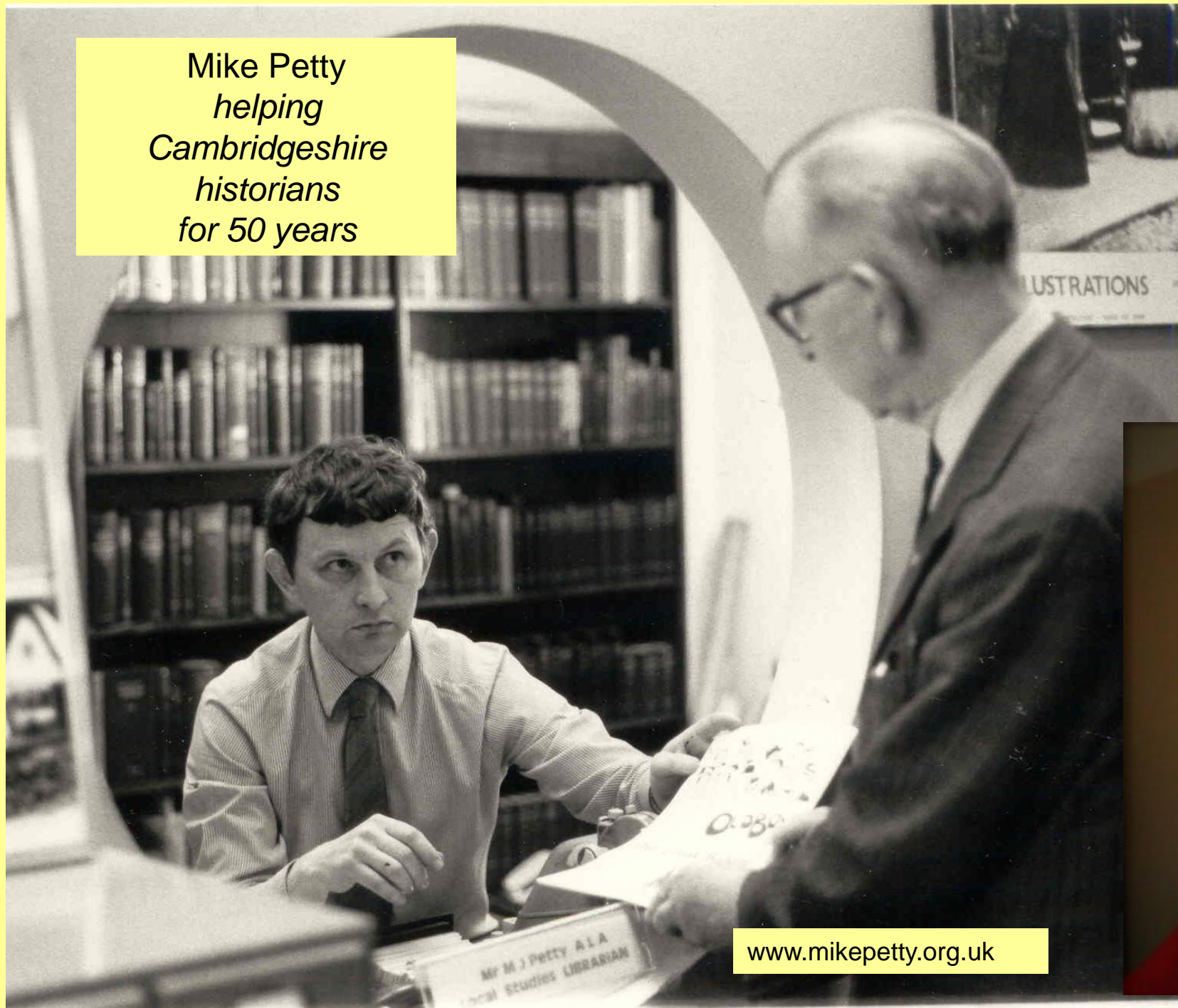
Warren Wilson

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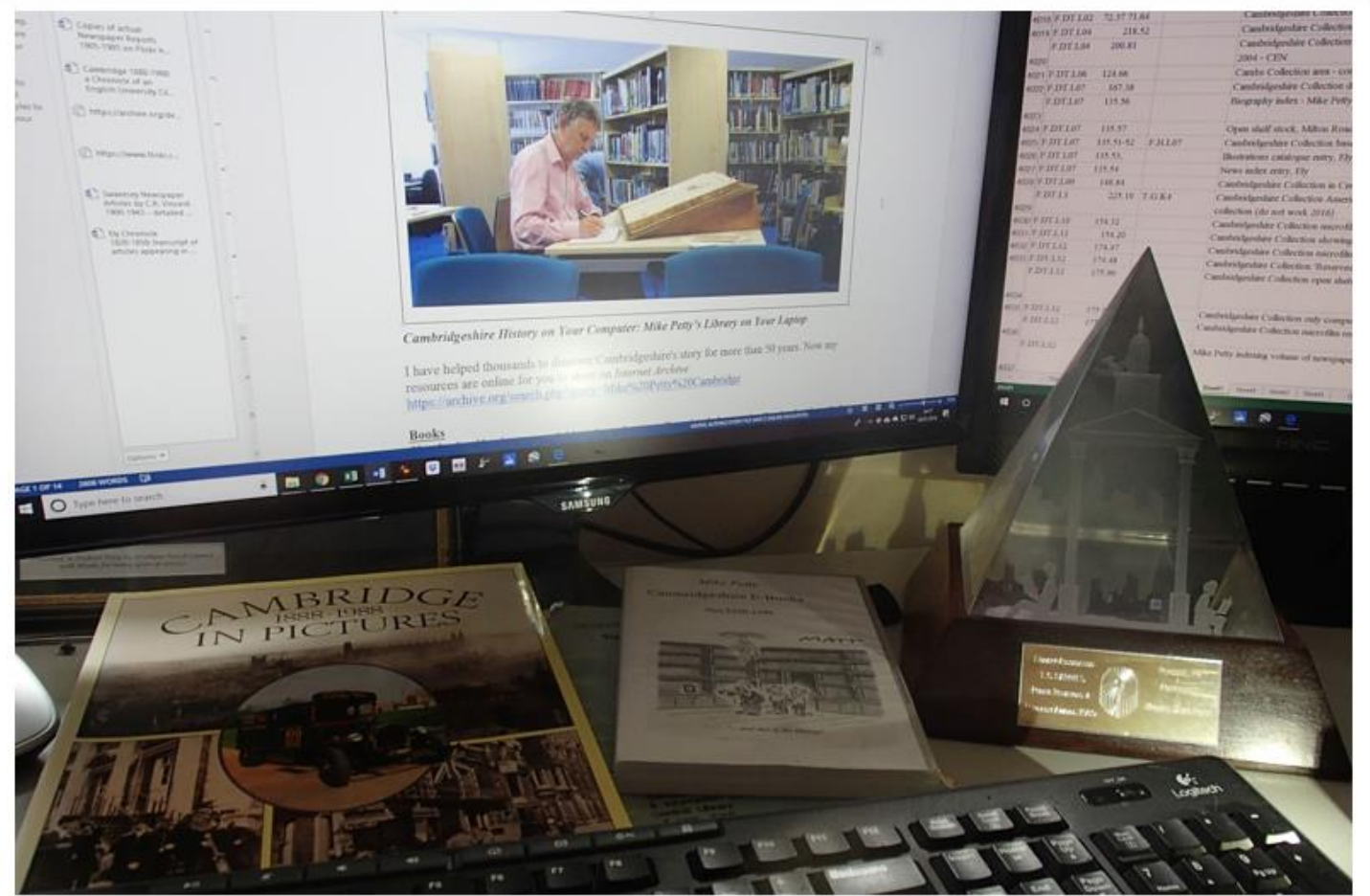
Mike Petty
helping
Cambridgeshire
historians
for 50 years

For more than 30 years Mike Petty organised the Cambridgeshire Collection at Cambridge Central Library.



www.mikepetty.org.uk





Now Mike shares his knowledge online
on ***Fenland History on Facebook*** and
Internet Archive

Cambridgeshire History on Your Computer: Mike Petty's Library on Your Laptop
These notes offer a guide to some of the material on Cambridgeshire
that is freely available on your computer or laptop November 25th 2020

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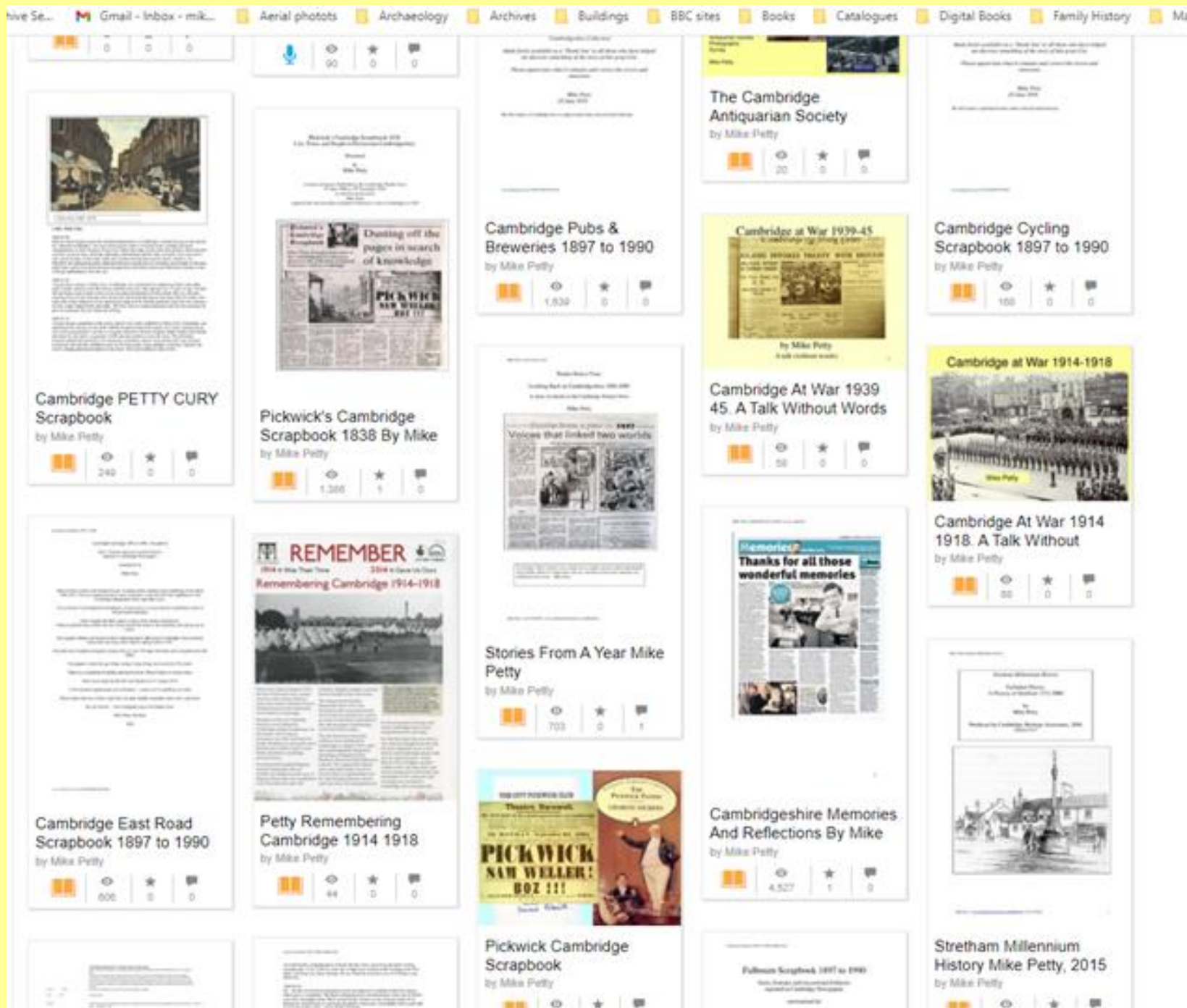
Many of my articles and other writings on the Internet Archive site.

Books and articles, p4

Bibliographies

Digitised books

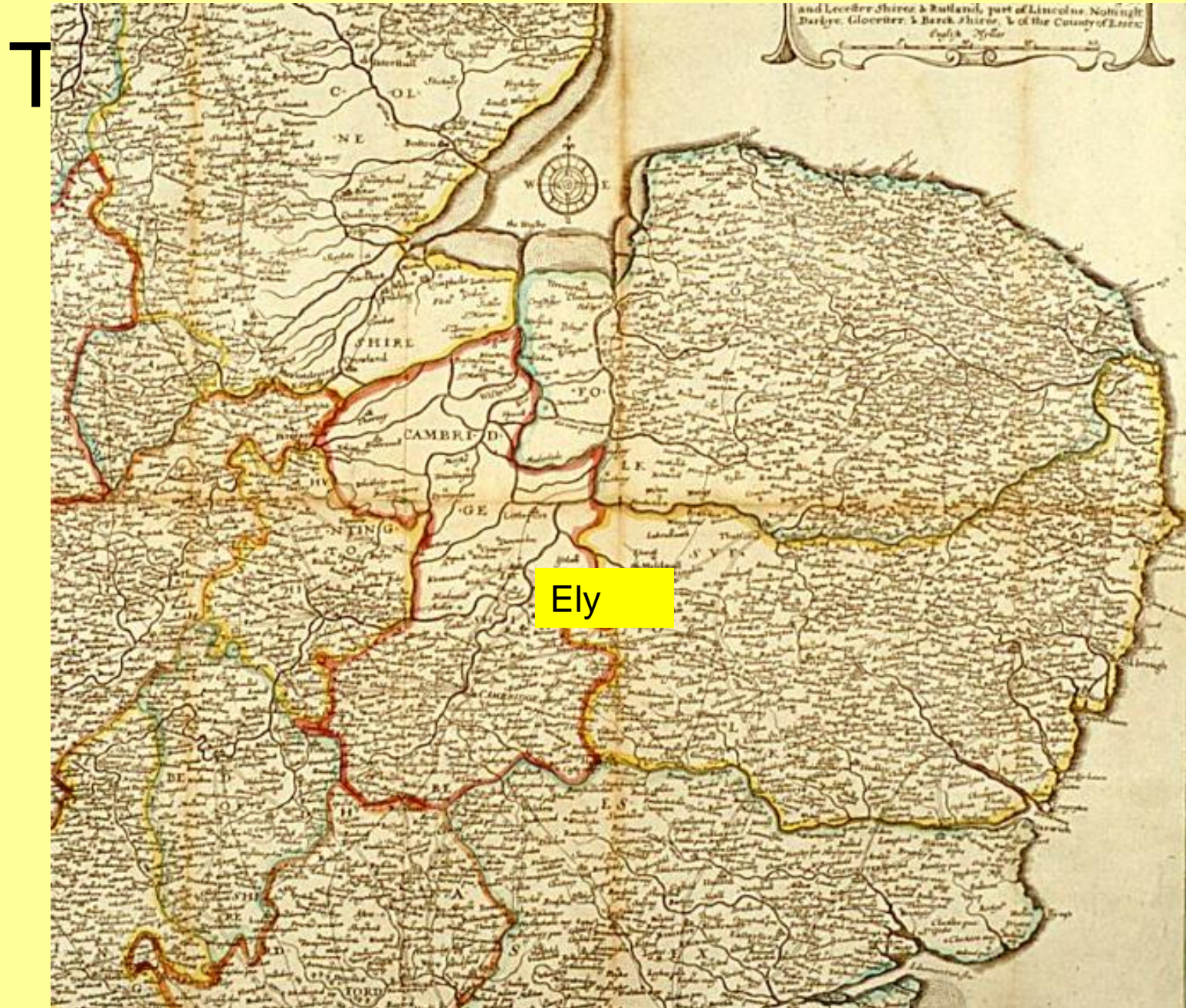
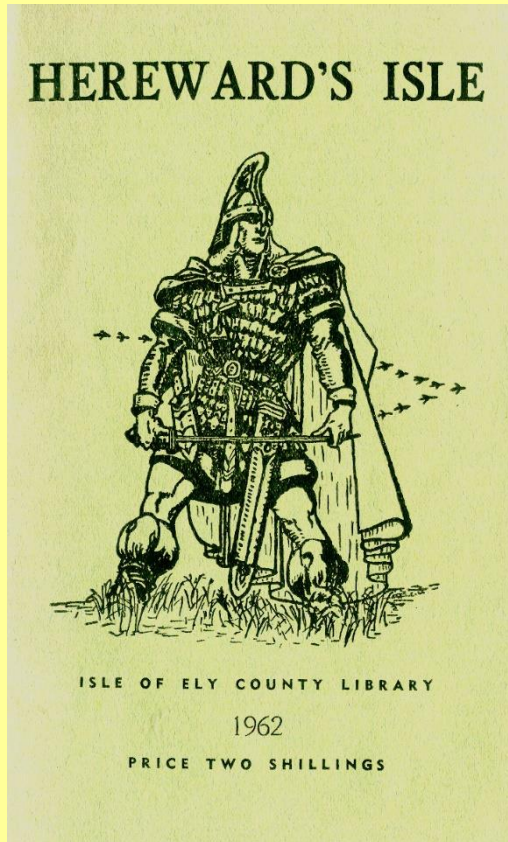
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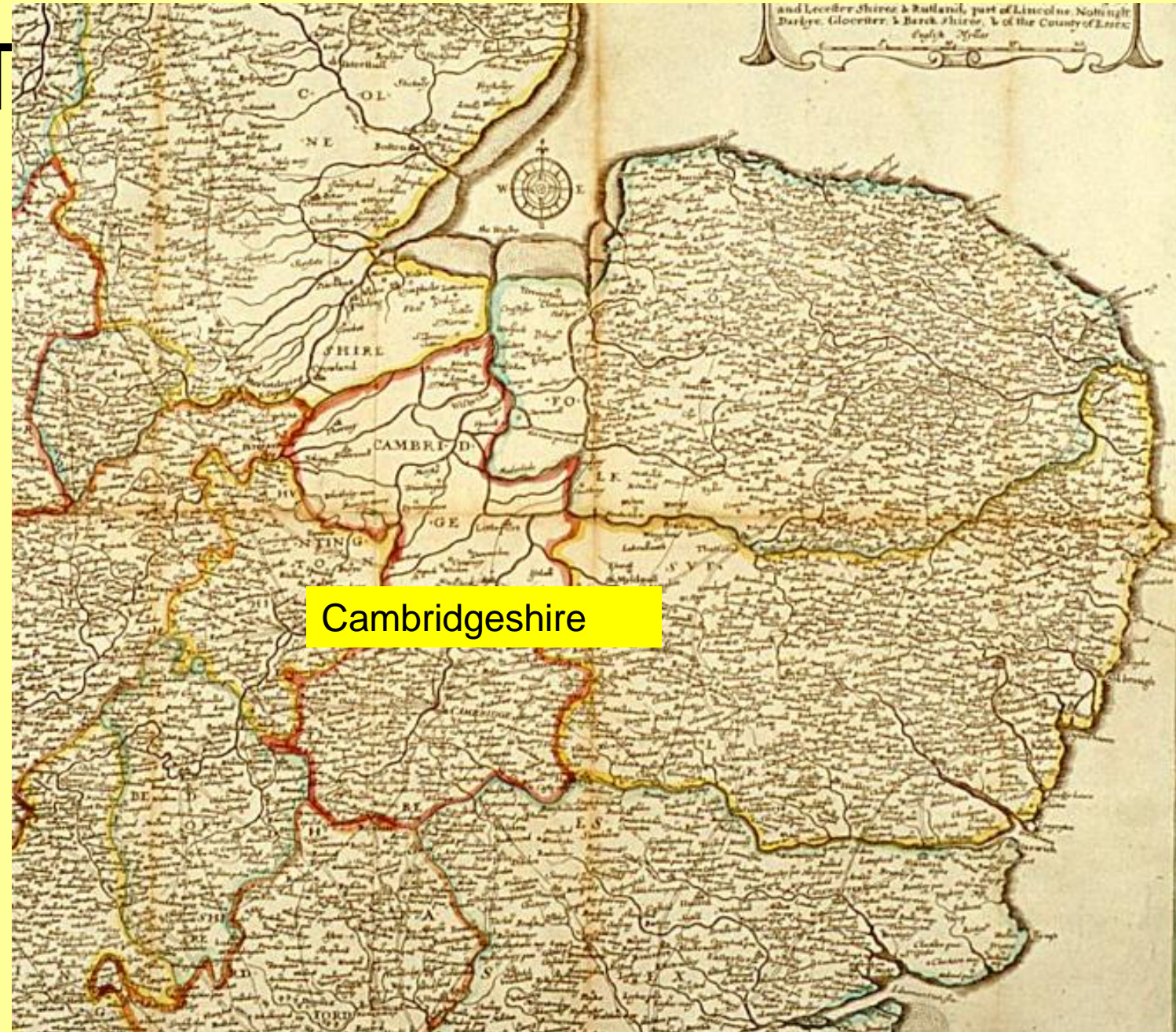
Hundreds of files on Internet Archive have been downloaded and used nearly 150,000 times

Hereward and Other Fighters Ely: Fortress Island

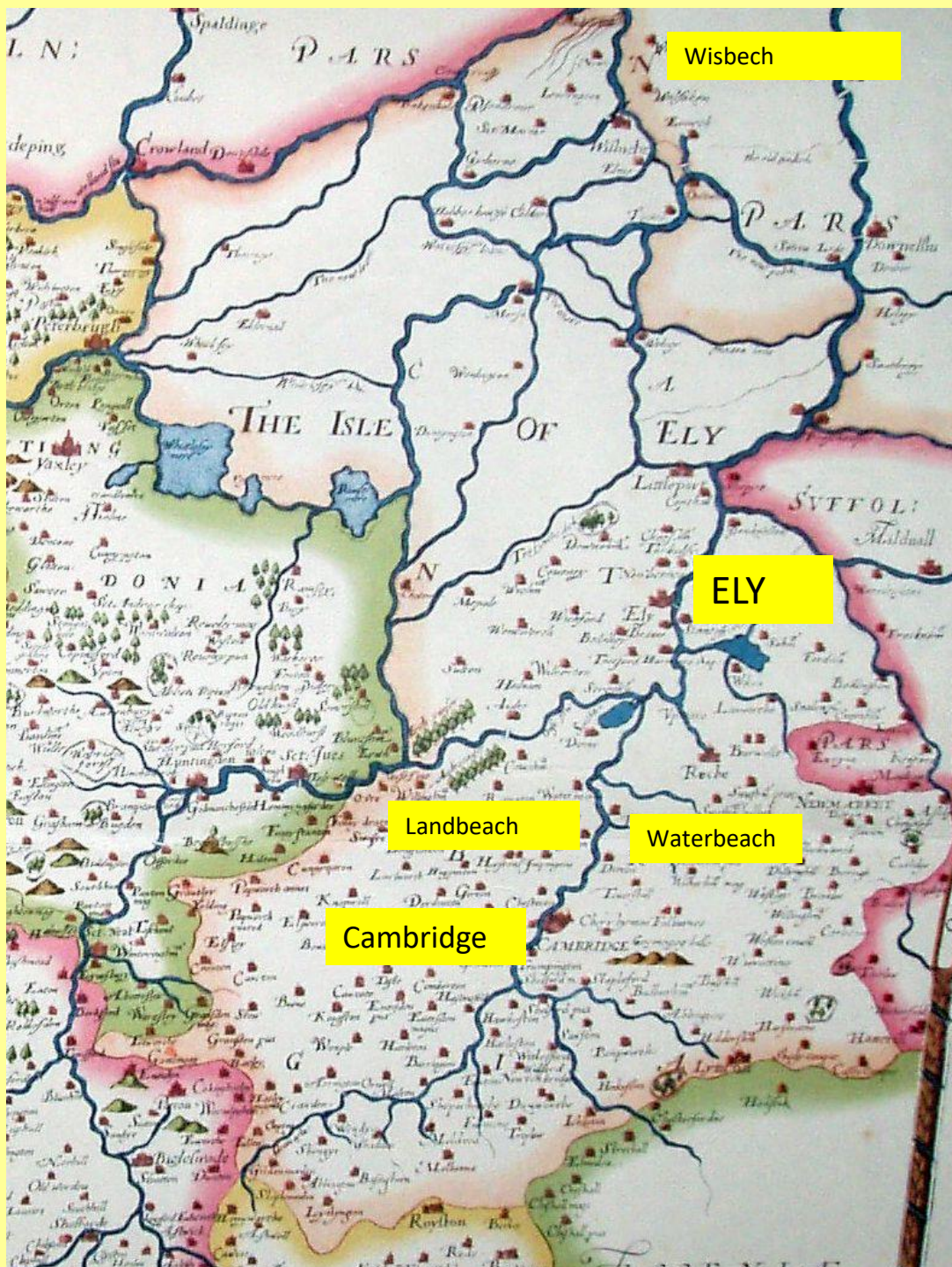
Mike Petty



Cambridgeshire is a county in East Anglia. It covers an area from the hills of Royston to the Wash at Wisbech

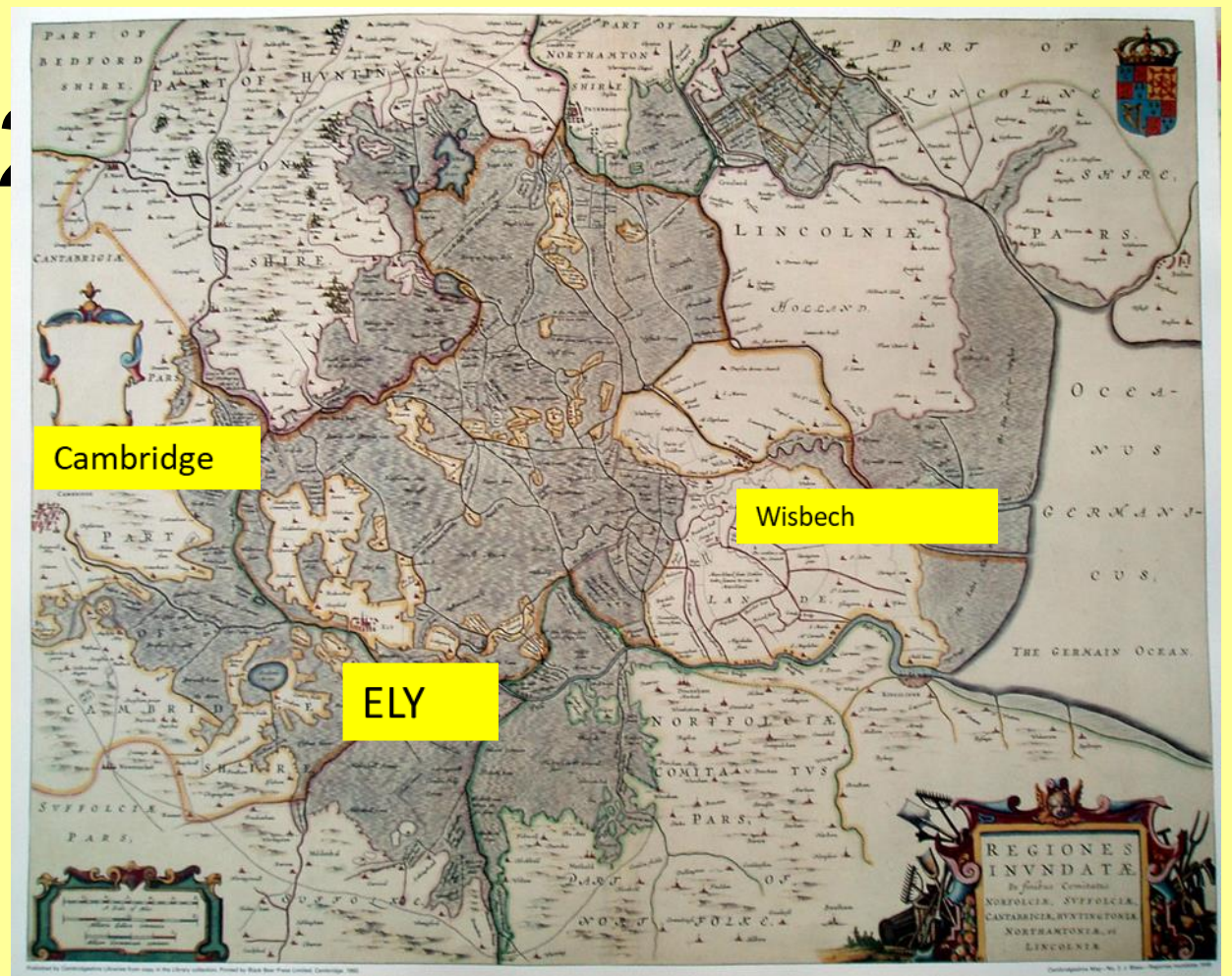
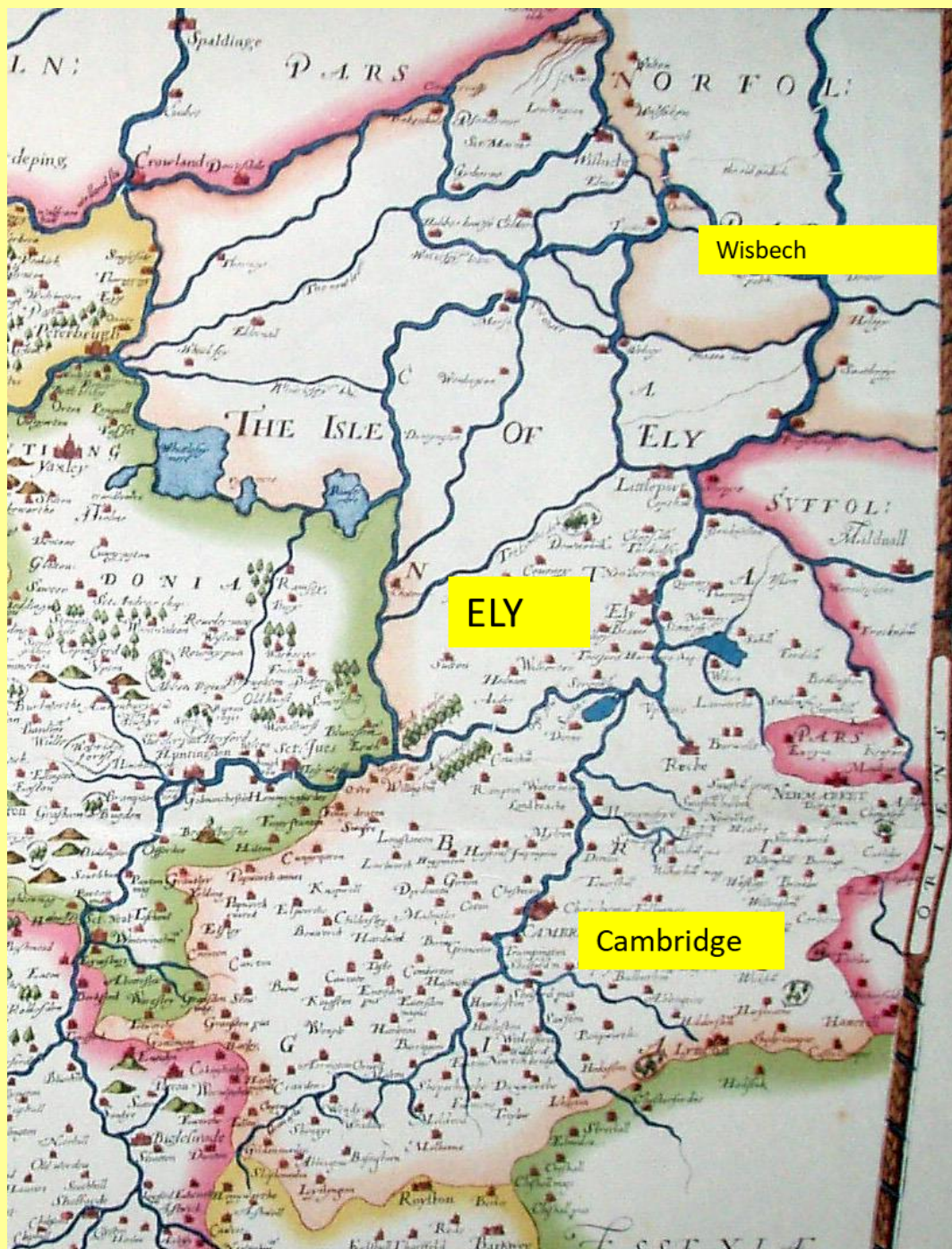


Cambridgeshire



Four miles north of Cambridge are the villages of Landbeach and Waterbeach. Beyond them lie the Fens, an area of wild, waterlogged, wilderness through which travel was difficult





A map of The Fens produced in 1630s with North to the right, shows the low-lying fens in grey

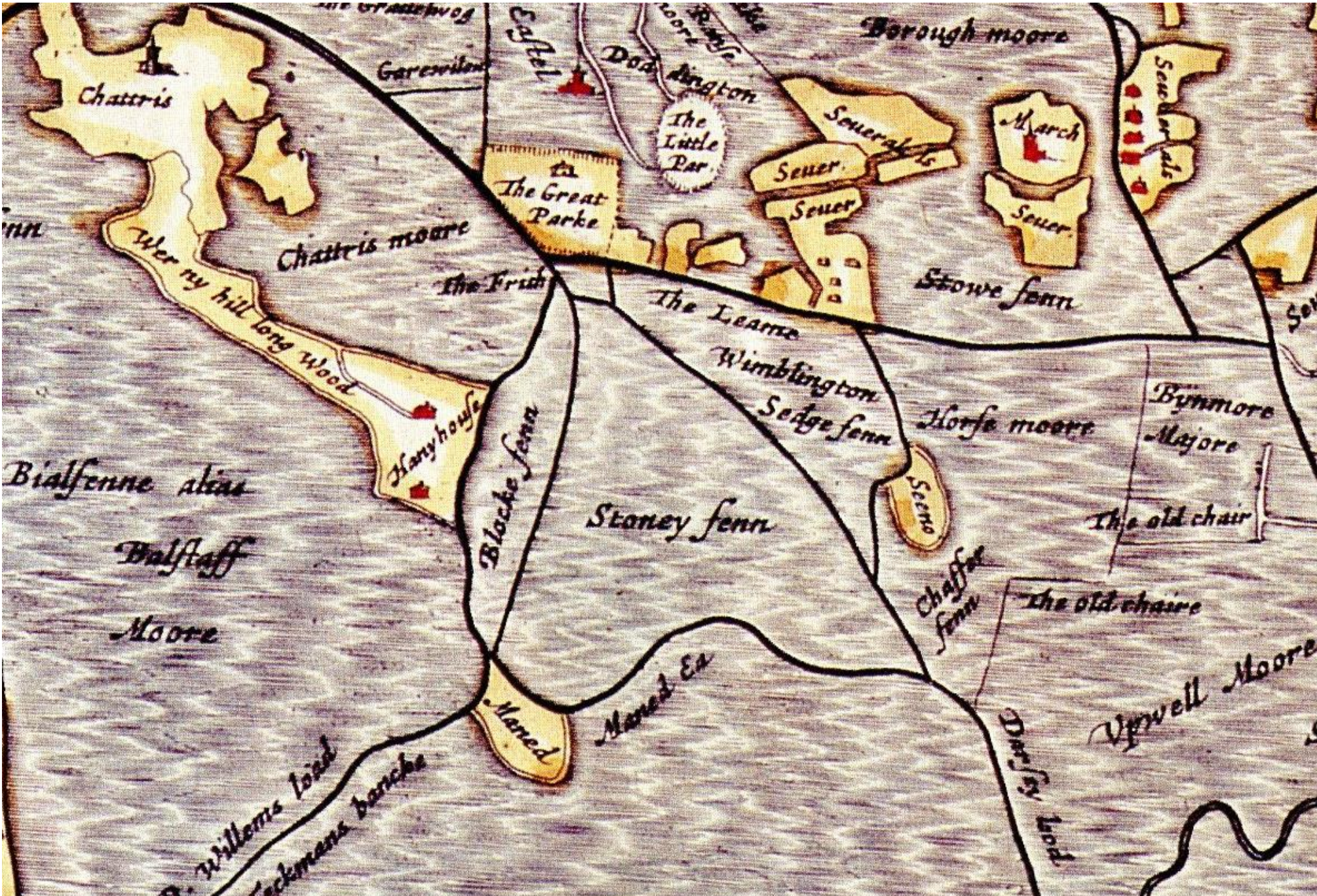


The Fens were an area of waterlogged marsh

Standing out of the marsh were a number of inaccessible Islands.

They were home to tribes of people who could farm the dry land of their island and exploit the rich resources the fenland provided, catching eels and ducks





Settlements grew on the island of Chatteris, the island of March, the island of Manea and an island called Stonea.

On these
inaccessible islands
tribes were free
from the invasion of
strangers



But invaders came. In AD43 the Romans invaded and quickly conquered south-east Britain. They bypassed the fenland area where various tribes were squabbling between themselves. Some tribes resisted the advance of the legions, and were defeated, others like the Iceni made peace. The Romans gave an order disarming all Britons - which was resisted by some of the fenland Iceni and enforced by an assault on their camp at Stonea. The Iceni made peace and were granted autonomy by Rome.



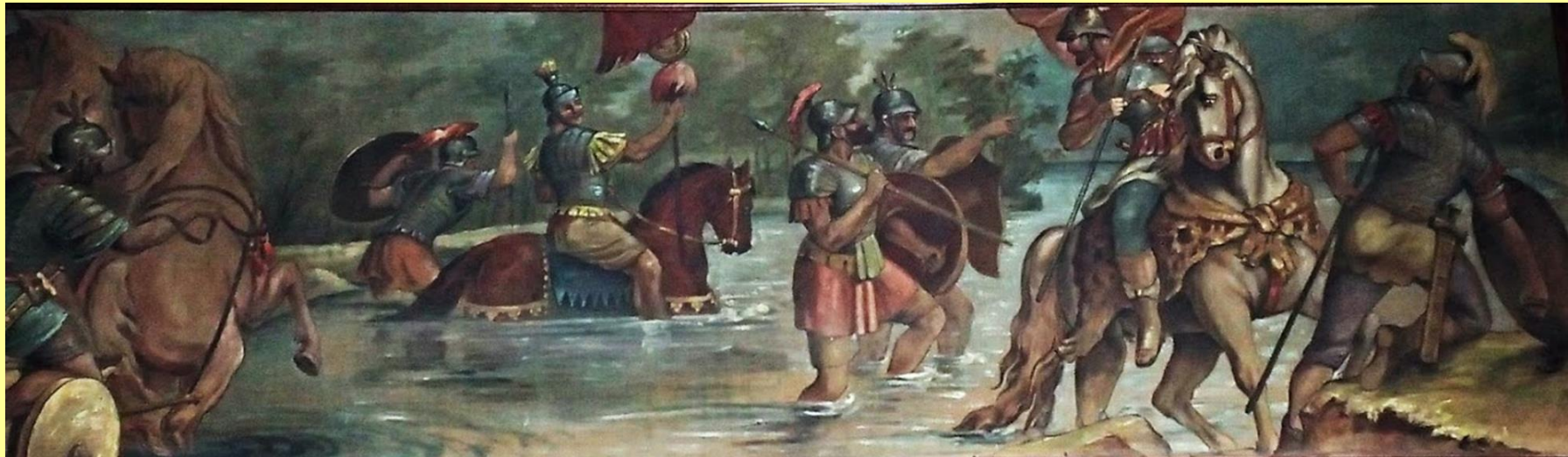
In AD60 the King of the Iceni died, leaving as his joint heirs his wife, Boudicea and the Emperor of Rome. The Iceni permitted female inheritance, the Romans did not. Legionaries took over their kingdom - some raping Queen Boudicea. The Iceni revolted overwhelming the Roman forces. Others joined in, they sacked London and St Albans before the main Roman forces marched to give battle and defeated them.

AD60



There was one place to be safe – the fens and the ancient settlement of Stonea.

Isolated in the middle of the marsh it was difficult to reach, especially by armoured men.



But the Romans found a way, perhaps having been shown a passage by the original fenmen, annoyed at the large numbers of dispossessed strangers who had invaded



To pacify the Fens the Emperor Hadrian established a New Town at Stonea, on the site of the Iron Age settlement. There was a fort, palace and administrative centre with walls painted to resemble marble, glass painted windows, mosaic floors and an elaborate heating system. They build a new temple to Minerva, overlaying an earlier shrine, and a tower dominating the fens. Within a century it had disappeared and been forgotten.

Stonea Camp



The earthwork at Stonea has been recreated. But across the fen at Wardy Hill a similar settlement has disappeared.



The largest Island of Ely became a place of refuge for a Princess.

Anna, the King of East Anglia, married one daughter to the King of Kent. Another, Etheldreda, married to a Prince of the Girvii who gave her the Isle of Ely as a dowry. Etheldreda insisted that the marriage never be consummated.

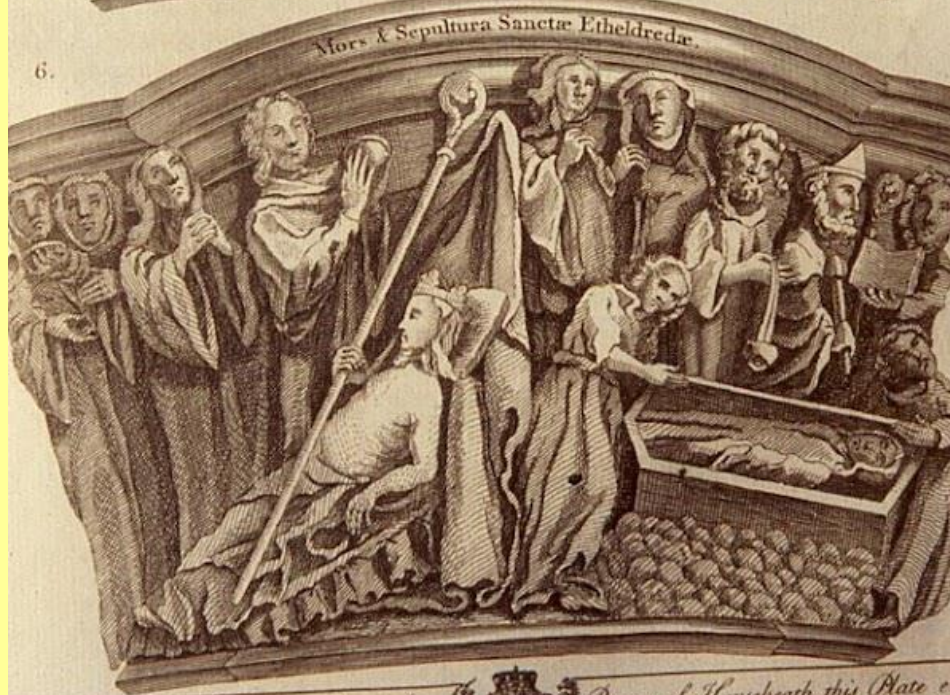
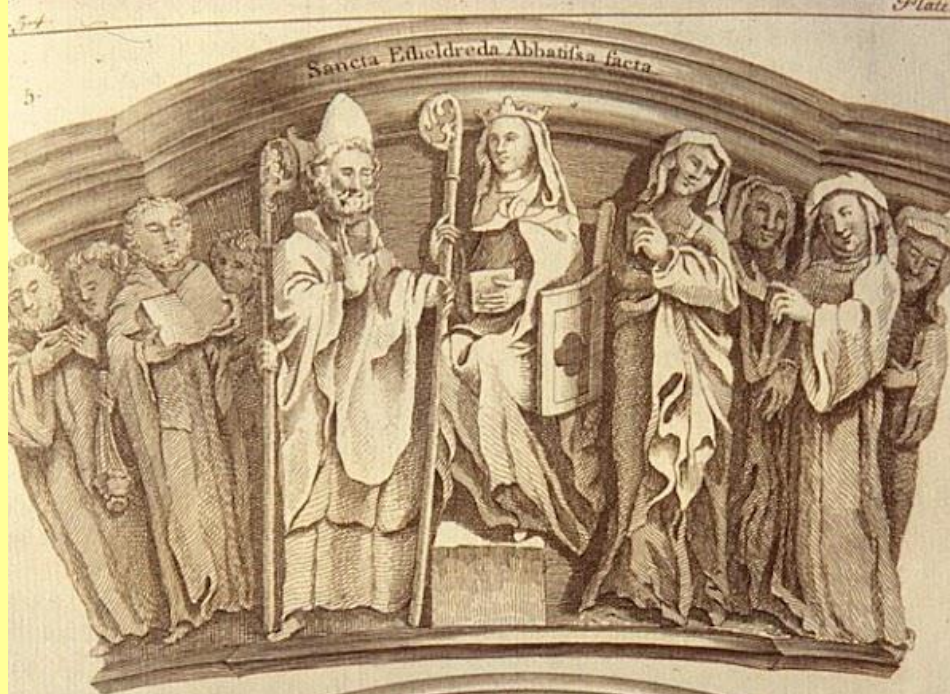
Three years later, after his death, she made another political marriage to Egfrid, son of Oswy of Northumbria - a boy only half her age.

Once more she insisted on her virginity and for a while the 12-year-old lad agreed. Then he changed his mind. Etheldreda fled to her Island in the Fens.

Her young husband followed but found his way blocked by the flooded landscape..

Etheldreda decides to found a church on the Island in 673. Here she was consecrated Abbess of Ely by Bishop Wilfrid of York and a mixed community of 40 to 50 monks and nuns lived a simple religious life.





the R.^d Hon.^{ble} Thomas Lord Montfort
 at his expense is most gratefully
 inscribed by James Benthall

In 679 Etheldreda died and was buried in a plain wooden coffin. She was succeeded by her sister Sexburgha who some 16 years later arranged for her reburial in a marble coffin.

When Etheldreda's body was transferred to her new coffin the monks found her body entirely free from corruption - a miracle.



But to get to the Island
there had to be a
passageway through the
fen; the Monks
constructed one





In 794 the East Anglian King was beheaded by Mercians and by the time they had re-established their power there was a new enemy.

In 866 the Danes invaded, a large heathen army made its winter quarters in East Anglia.

King Edmund the Martyr led his Saxon army against them but was defeated and slain at a battle at Thetford. The Danes ravaged unchecked; they sacked the monastery at Soham & drove the priests and all the people into the building before setting it on fire;



Many locals were massacred, others retreated into the fenland marshes.

Great dykes are cut spanning the area from the impenetrable forests at Wood Ditton to the fens at Reach; preventing attack from the south towards Norfolk. Campaigns are frequent but much of area was captured by Redwald, a mighty East Anglian king – buried at Sutton Hoo - whose kingdom extended from Norfolk and Suffolk to the fenlands.



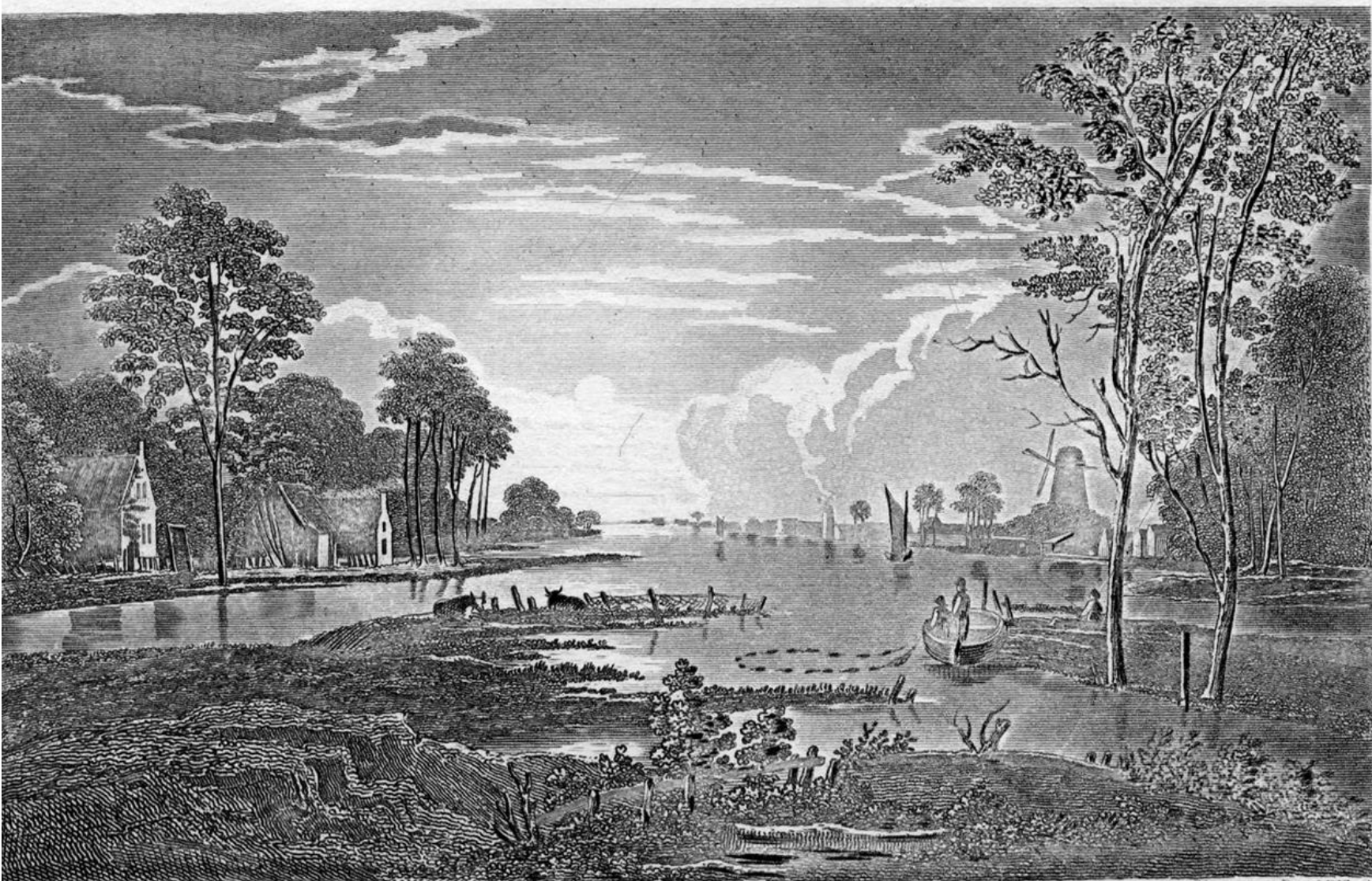
In 1010 the Danes invaded again and once more took possession; then plundered and burned. They moved deep into the wild fens, slaying men and cattle. King Etheldred the Unready tried to buy them off, and then engaged them in battle; but was defeated

The world became relatively peaceful, and Christianity arrived with religious sites principally Peterborough, Thorney, Crowland. Villages were established, with their own churches.



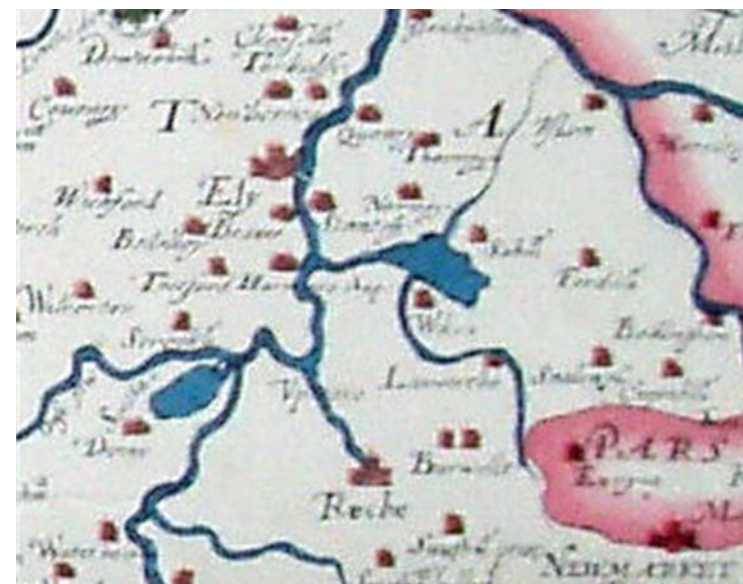
Danish King Canute (1016-1035) learned of Etheldreda's story and turned Christian.

King Canute visited Ely for the festival of the Purification of the Blessed Virgin Mary, walking over the frozen Soham Mere - and using a fat fenman called Pudding to lead the way and test the ice.



VIEW AT SOHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

Soham Mere was one of a number of inland lakes, deep enough to be crossed by boat. There were others including Harrimere, near Lt Thetford and Stretham



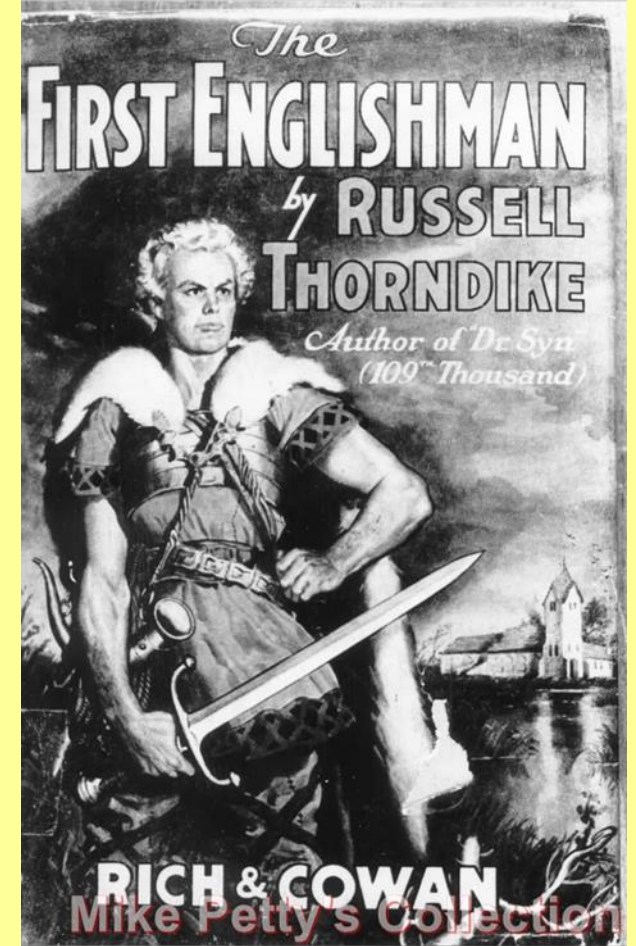


1066

The Battle of Hastings saw the death of King Harold and the arrival of an occupying army intent on imposing their will on the land they had conquered



By 1066 Ely comprised a small community of 50 monks. The current incumbent was Abbot Thurstan, who had been appointed by King Harold; he did not relish the consequences of a Norman take-over.



Various disaffected and dispossessed remnants of the English sought refuge on the island, including the Bishop of Durham; they were joined by a troublesome youth who had been banished by his family and won himself a reputation as a fighting man, and returned to find his own estates held by Normans. His name was Hereward.

The Isle of Ely was strongly defensible, being completely surrounded by almost stagnant meres and marshes.





William attempted an attack in 1069, but found it difficult to force a passage, so he left it alone while he sorted out other troublespots. In 1070 he returned came to Cambridge where he built himself a castle while he considered what to do





William built forts
around the edge
of the Fens and
planned assaults
by constructing
causeways ...
and failed again



To honour Monk John. (a soft man)



Bishop Herve (AD 1130) ordered a causeway to be cut through the reeds, so that St Edmund the
visit St Etheldreda. but despite his laws, no man durst attempt it. Then Monk John
(a soft man) says the historian, began and finished a good man, and fine
astonishment. Good old monk John.

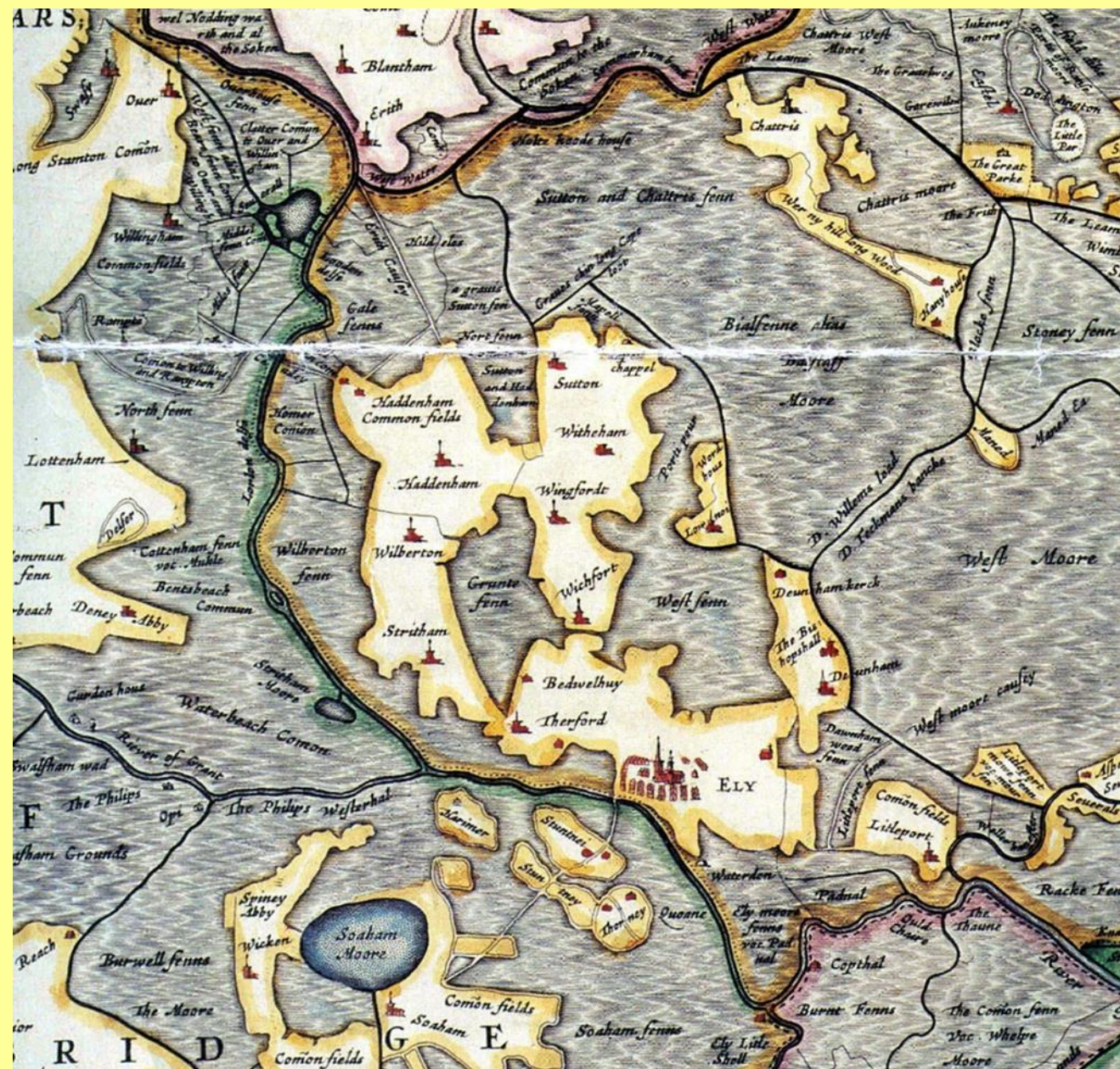
Mike Petty's Collection

But if he could not get onto the Island William could lay siege to it, restricting food supplies. The monks were also finding their warlike guests something of a handicap. They decided to negotiate informing William of the secret passageways onto the Island. But William was in no hurry.

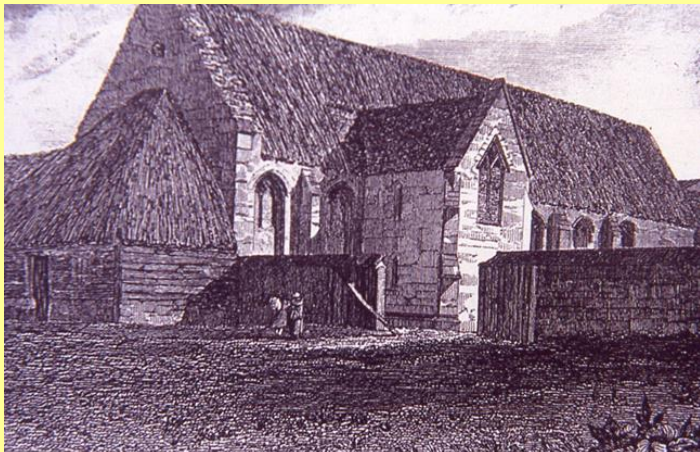
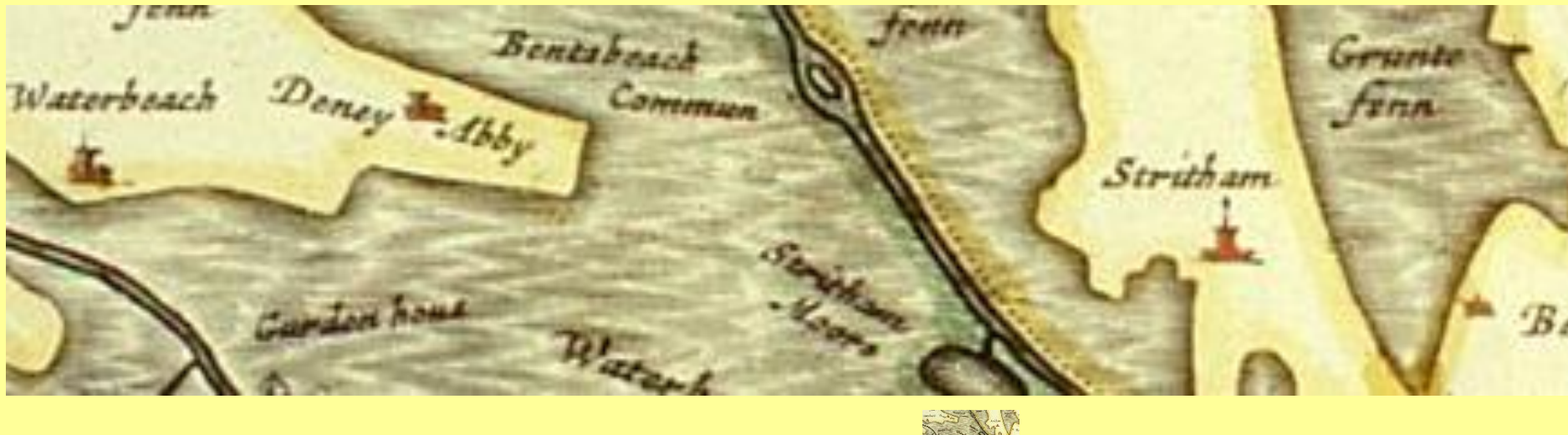


Then in 1071 one of Hereward's leaders was killed in a mutiny of his own men, and news came that the Scots were coming to add their support. William decided this was time to act. Once more he forced an approach – this time he knew the way.

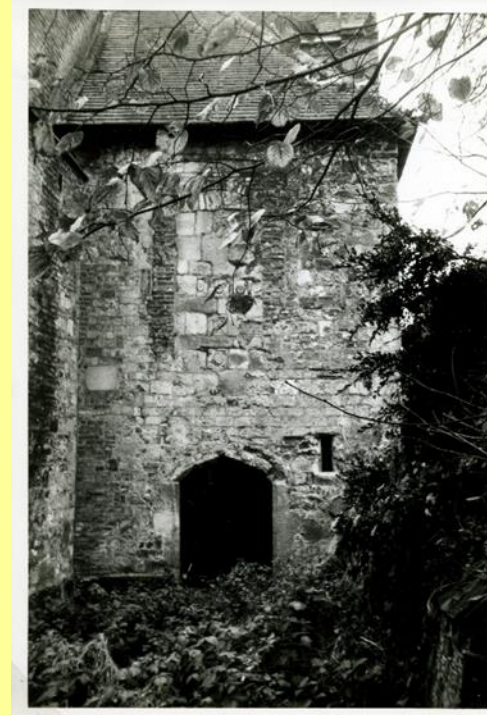
But which way was it



The Romans had constructed Akeman Street north from Cambridge. But the route of Akeman Street had been lost the fens between Chittering and Stretham, it does not show on Blaeu's map.



Denny Abbey was founded on the edge of the 'main land' an earthwork constructed on the shores of the Island at Elford Farm with a stone tower at Stretham

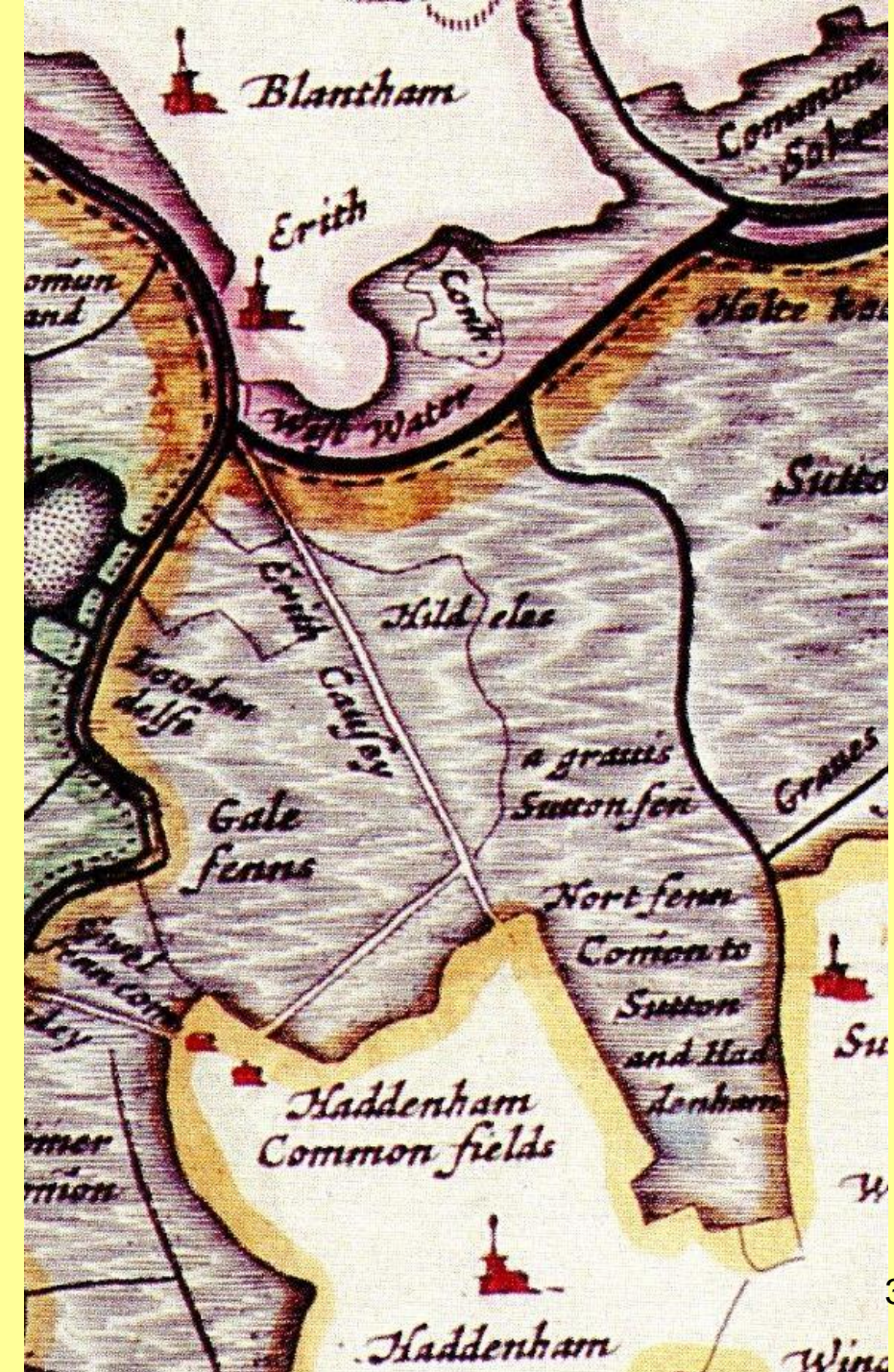




The main route on to the Island was an causeway through the fen between Rampton and Aldreth.

At the southern end the causeway cuts through an ancient earthwork called Belsar's Hill, one of a number of such camps throughout the fen

A second ancient causeway ran through the fen from Earith to Hillrow and Haddenham.
At Earith there is another ancient earthwork that was later used during the Civil War and World War II

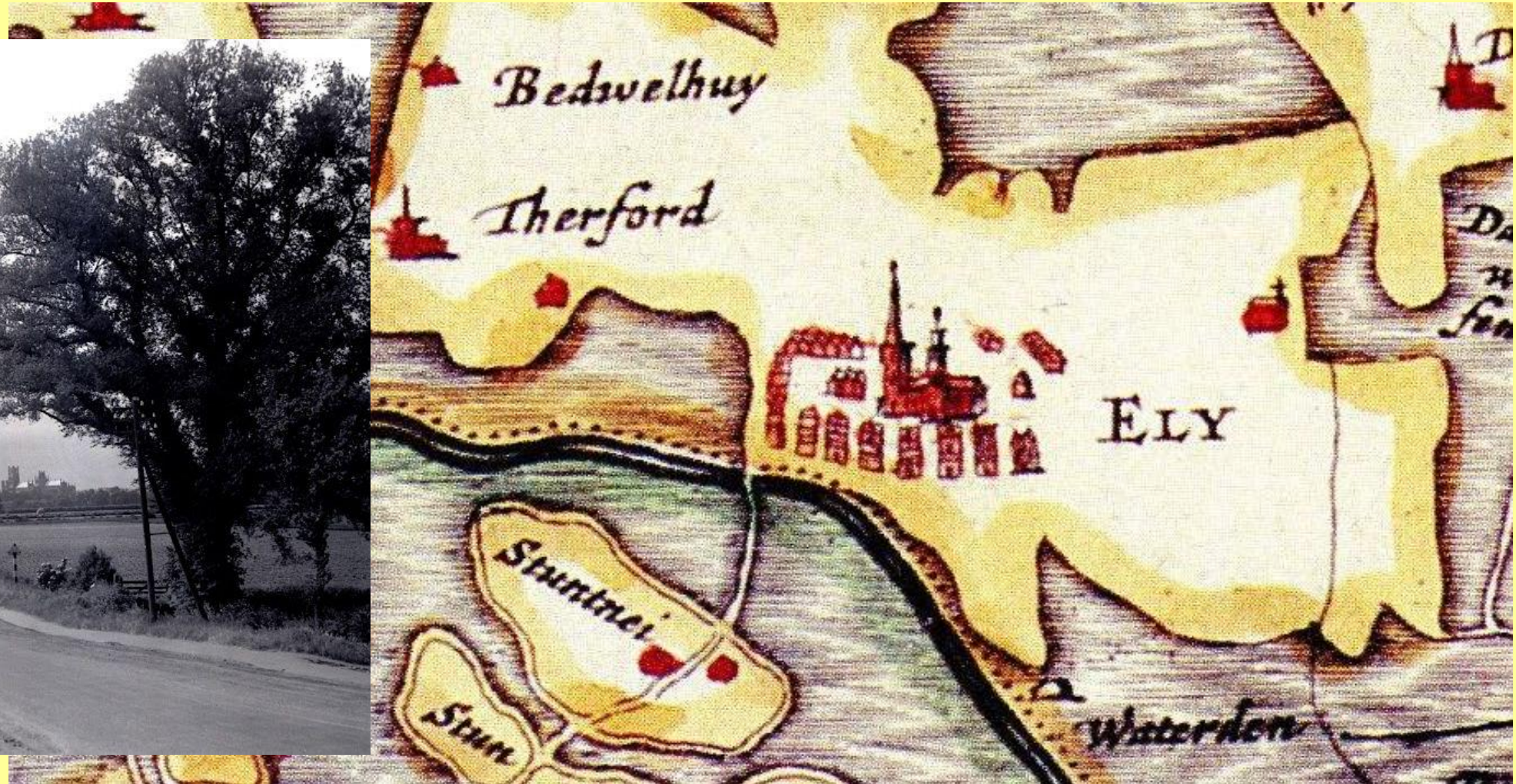




During the floods of 1947 Hillrow farmers retreated along the causeway to the safety of the Isle of Ely as people had done for centuries. As the floods subsided the causeway emerged from the water.



A much shorter causeway was the one constructed by the Monks from Ely to Stuntney. It was the obvious route for an attack. But this meant crossing the Great Ouse, squeezed in between the island of Ely and the Island of Stuntney as well as the waterlogged fen. And any preparations were easily observed from the high land at Ely. Though William had crossed the English channel, this small stretch of fen frustrated him.



But there was another ancient crossing, not marked on the 1604 map. In 1936 archaeologists discovered a causeway that ran from Barway across the fen to Little Thetford. This was a approach which was not overlooked. It runs past a site known as Chapel Hill, which has recently been the subject of an archaeological excavation. And at Little Thetford a number of ancient swords were discovered

CAMBRIDGE STANDARD, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 1935.

CANNIBAL ORGIES OF THE PRIMITIVE FENMEN

A Fen Causeway of the Bronze Age


MYSTERY OF THE GREAT DYKES

The primitive dwellers along the banks of the fen swamps and bogs were cannibals, not through necessity but by desire. They may have performed human sacrifices.


These are views which emerge from the investigations carried out by investigators of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society, whose proceedings from Oct., 1933, to Oct., 1934, are now published.

Some of the accounts which have been given before the Society reveal that there is often a romantic development in such research.

Mr. T. C. Lethbridge, who advances the views given above, tells how he went to examine an age-old causeway between Fordy and Little Thetford. It had been thought it was a relic of the days of The Wakes, but the experts proved that it must be of a much earlier date.



Causeway between Fordy and Little Thetford. Site of chapel marked by "x" immediately above it. The old "Seven Stars" to the left.



Anglo-Saxon swords from Waterbeach.

metery at Guilden Morden some years ago. From an artistic point of view, the writer says, the lamp is one of the finest pieces of its time.

Mr. C. F. Feibell and Mr. Lethbridge contribute a paper on the bases of ancient lime kilns at Great Paston, Hunstanton, and their relation to the Anglo-Saxon church of the parish, introducing a most interesting theory of establishing a link between late Saxon and Norman pottery by reference to excavations on the site of Flambard's Manor at Meldreth, thought to have been founded soon after the Norman conquest.

Mr. Lethbridge, Mr. M. O'Reilly and Mr. Leal contribute, under "Archaeological Notes," an account of part of a collection bequeathed to the Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology by the late Mr. A. F. Griffith. The collection includes a number of objects from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery at Hooper's Hill are contributed by Dr. Lloyd, and Mr. Saltmarsh, of King's.

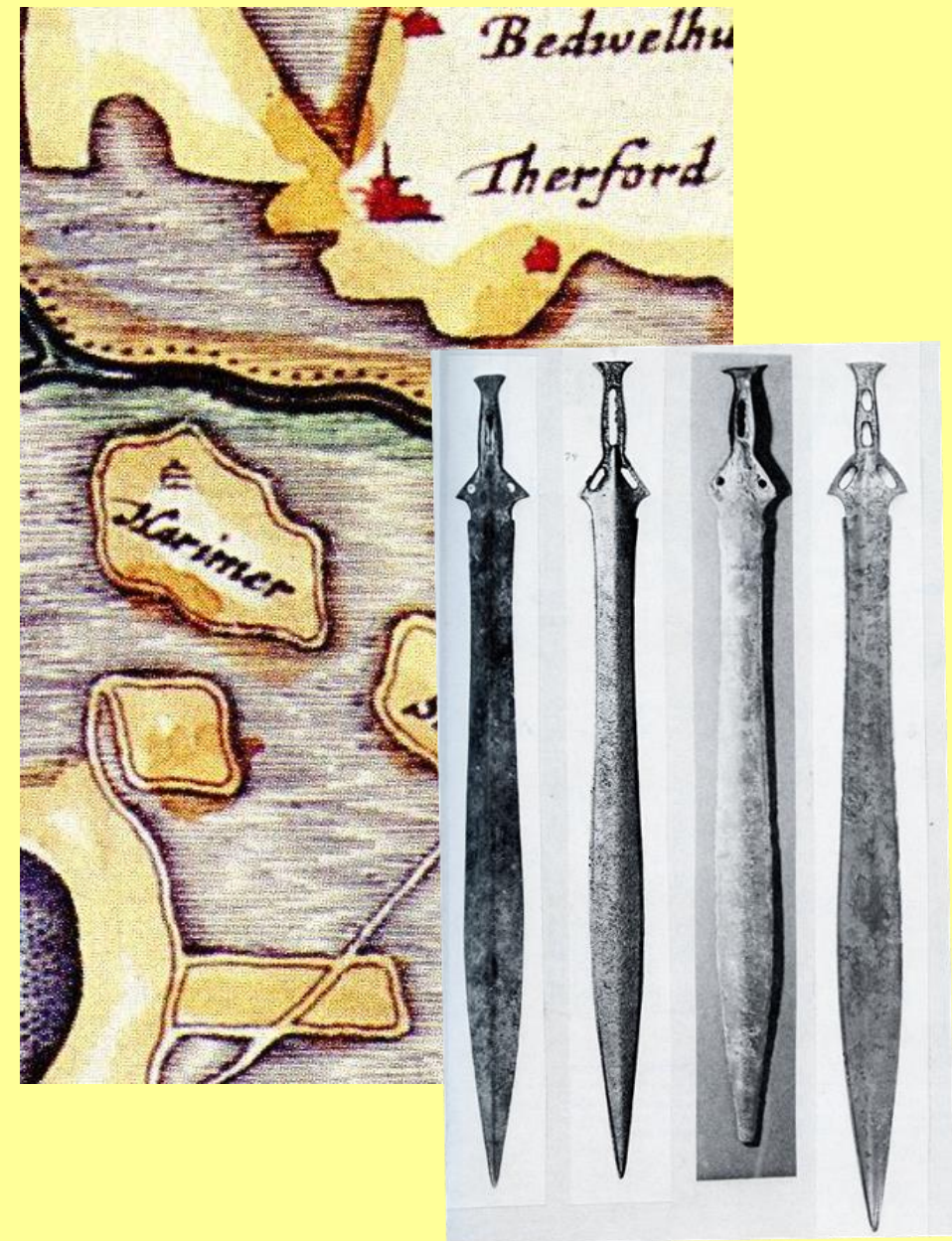
"John Workworth (c. 1425-1500) and his Chapel in St. Mary-the-Less, Cambridge (by Mr. E. A. B. Barnard) is an admirable account of this pious Master of Peterhouse, and of the excavation made in 1929 by Dr. Robert Lachlan, assisted by Mr. Barnard, to determine the site and dimensions of Workworth's chapel, which, with the exception of the mutilated arch and doorway, disappeared hundreds of years ago. In 1831 a new and larger chapel was erected over the foundations of the old Workworth chapel.

The volume is profusely illustrated, and the pictures appearing on this page have been loaned to the "Standard" by the Society.

NOTE BY DR. W. M. PALMER ON HARRIMERE.

* Harrimere is a corruption of

Farm, another excavation was made and the site was investigated of herdsmen and hunters. Possibly they lived in a state of war with the Romans. The site was investigated of which Mr. A. B. Steel has kindly found Anglo-Saxons at three of the sites, and a man with what seems to be a late Romano-British pot broken.



word is "Alrehede."

The traditional connotation of Alrehede is Aldreth. But the opposing side of the debate on Monday put forward the theory that it is the area now the site of Alderforth Farm — at the end of the Stuntney Causeway.

Proposing the theory that William invaded via Aldreth was Dr. R C Smail, Fellow of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, who has for three years led a course on the history of the village of Aldreth. With him was his son, Richard, a pupil at the Perse School, whose essay on the Aldreth Causeway won him first prize in the essay competition organised by Cambridgeshire Local History Council this year.

Propounding the other view was Reg Holmes, a noted Ely local historian who has compiled a work on "The Battle of Alrehede" and has conducted an investigation on the site.

Alongside Mr. Holmes was Charles Bester — surprisingly, as he is parish clerk and an acknowledged expert in the local history of Haddenham — the main stronghold of the traditional theory. Chairing the debate was Mr.

Alrehede — which is a derivative of two Anglo-Saxon words meaning "landing place by the alders."

The main arguments for the Smail case were summed up in five points:

1—Two sources of information (De Gestis Herewardi and Liber Eliensis) agree that there was a fight at Alrehede.

2—It seems that before William's time there was some sort of crossing of the fens

miles wide when at Stuntney it is barely a quarter that distance?

He also argued that Cotingalada was said to be, in the old accounts, seven miles from Littleport. If this was so, an arc drawn seven miles from the village takes in quite easily the village of Stuntney.

However, Dr. Smail argued this point, saying that medieval measurements were not to be relied upon. They were very

With a vote of 38 for Aldreth and 18 for Stuntney it looks as if tradition still dies hard.



Defeated: Ely historian Mr Reg Holmes points out to Mr Michael Petty, organiser of the debate, his battle field as they look across from the Little Thetford side of the Ouse to the causeway at Barway. (Picture: Brian M Lane).



Two noted local historians Reg Holmes and Charles Bester, were convinced this was the way the Conqueror would have chosen, as Reg explained to Mike Petty



But the Aldreth route, advocated by Dr R.C. Smail and his son, Richard was backed at a public debate held at Aldreth in 1972

Hereward's last stand: Aldreth wins decision

When William the Conqueror finally defeated Hereward the Wake 902 years ago the route of his attack was the Aldreth Causeway.

But champions of the other possible route — via the Stuntney Causeway — put up a good fight, and after a 2½-hour debate at Haddenham on Monday only lost out by 20 votes in the final show of

P R Ravensdale of Fitzwilliam College and lecturer at Homerton College, another local historian of note.

Propounding his father's theory, Richard Smail set the scene. He said that from 1068 to 1070 William had trouble with Danes all over the country.

The King and his army had many encounters with bands of

at Aldreth, and when he came he used it.

3—The two sources of documentary evidence show that William commanded a causeway to be built across the fens.

4—A small lake or mere named Cotingalada, where troops were gathered by William, seems to fit in with the village of Cottenham. This again indicates that he tried to

The winners: Dr R C Smail and his son Richard on the old bridge over the Old West River at Aldreth, looking towards their site — Aldreth Causeway. (Picture: Brian M Lane).

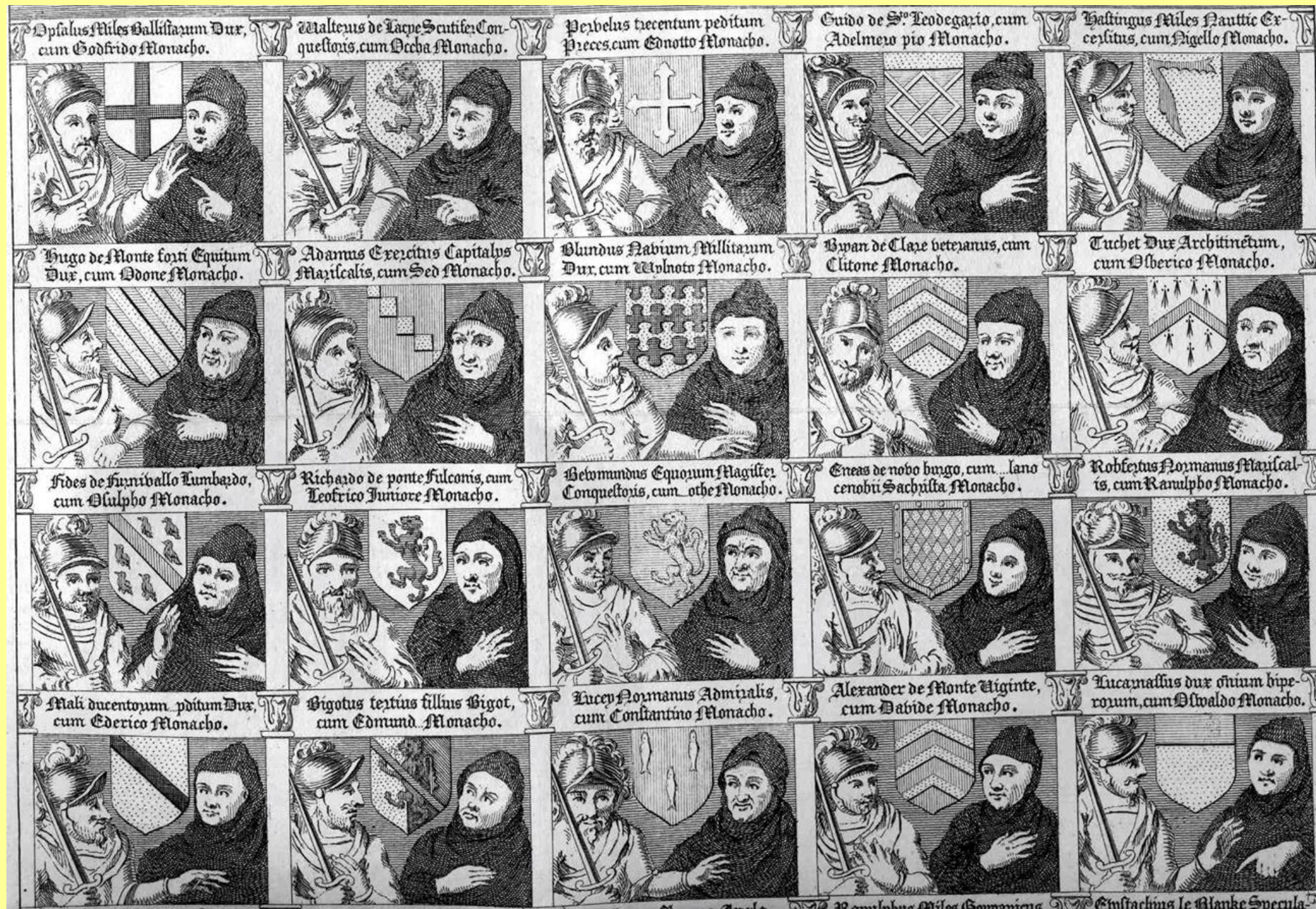


inaccurate and often led to confusion when looking at maps of the period, he said.

Mr. Holmes' theory was backed up by the discovery of weapons from the period of Hereward. These weapons were discovered many years ago near Braham Farm — the site of the Stuntney crossing.

Hitting back at this, Richard Smail said that although no weapons had ever been found

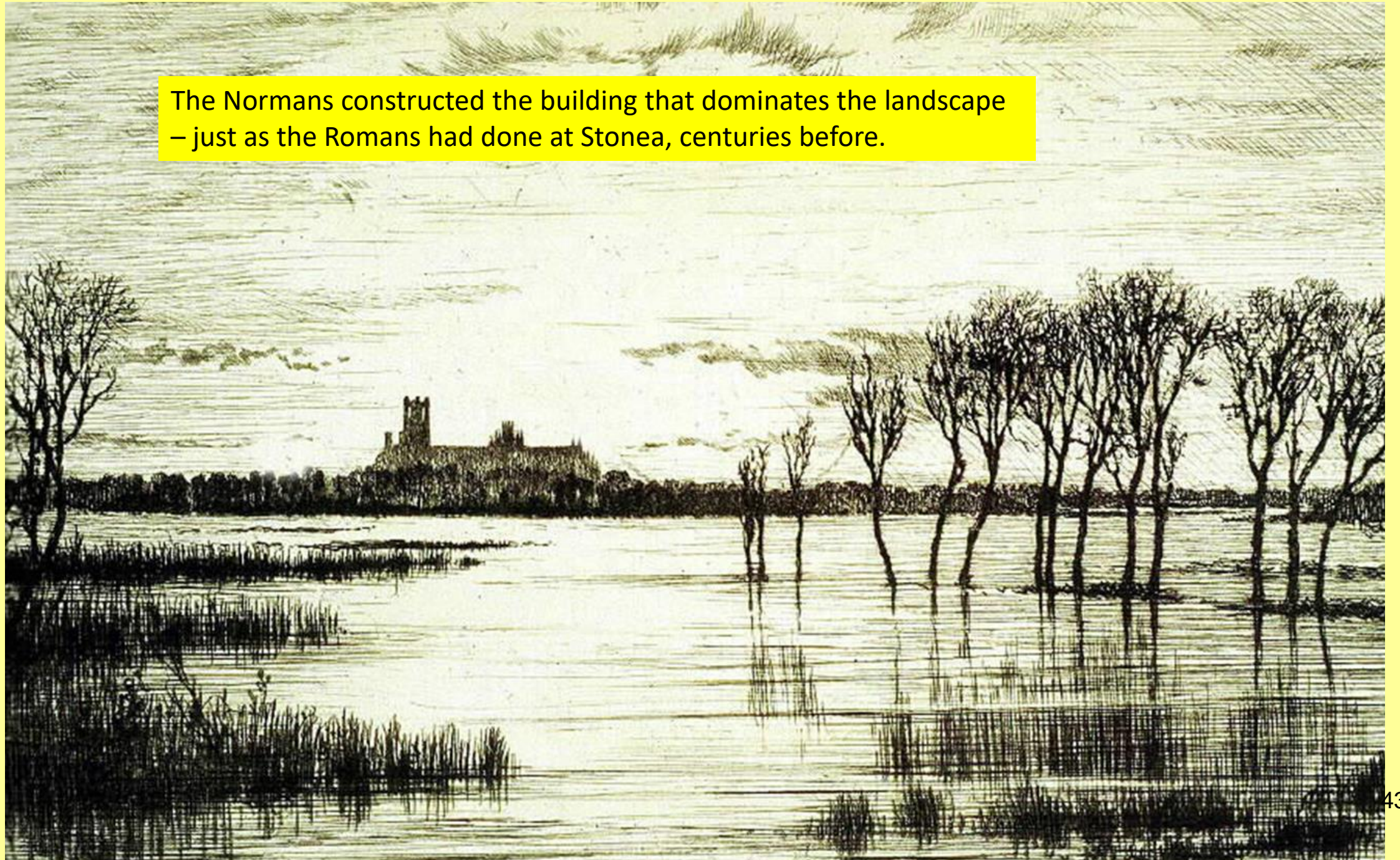
Once the Island had been captured Norman Knights took the place of Hereward and his warriors as 'guests' of the Ely Monks.



And on the isolated island in the Fens



The Normans constructed the building that dominates the landscape – just as the Romans had done at Stonea, centuries before.



At Ely, as at Cambridge,
William constructed a
Castle, now largely
forgotten

Another Fort was
constructed at
Aldreth – site
unknown

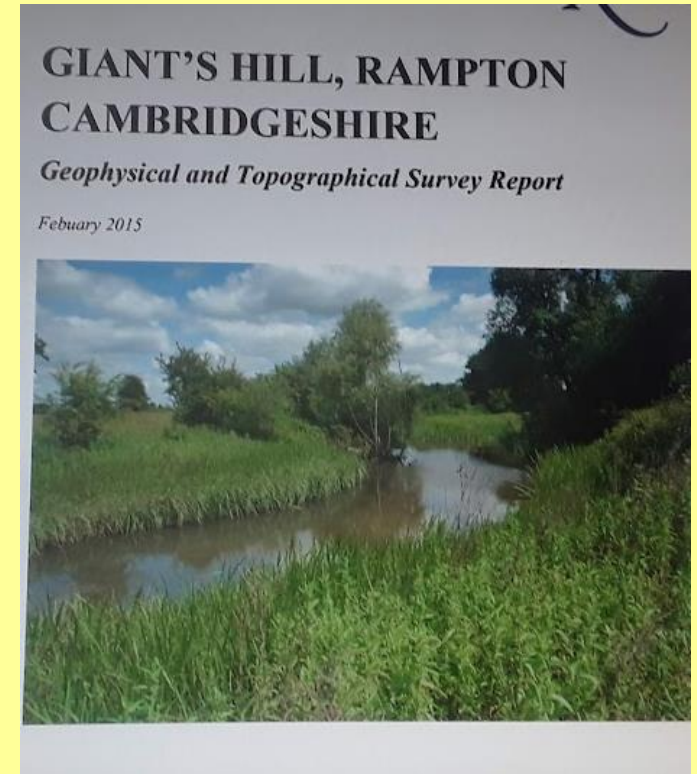
It was intended to
ensure the Island of
Ely was safe from
future invaders.

It failed



Cambridge Castle.

By 1139 the peace of the countryside had been lost;
On the death of Henry I a Civil War broke out between **King Stephen**, a grandson of William the Conqueror, who was crowned King though he had previously recognised Henry I's daughter, Matilda as heir to the throne.
Matilda claimed her inheritance and was supported by the Bishop of Ely
King Stephen laid siege to the Isle and drove the Bishop's knights out of Aldreth castle.
He acknowledged Matilda's son, Henry, to be his own heir.
At Rampton a motte and bailey castle was constructed, quite near the start of the Aldreth Causeway, probably on the site of a pre-Conquest settlement.
Another castle, at Burwell, was attacked by Geoffrey de Mandeville who died after he was wounded by an arrow



Following the signing by **King John** of Magna Carta in 1215, there was another brief civil war. A group of rebels sought shelter on the Isle and prepared for siege

Cold weather froze the fens, allowing the Royalists to cross. But King John died soon after having lost his baggage train in the Wash

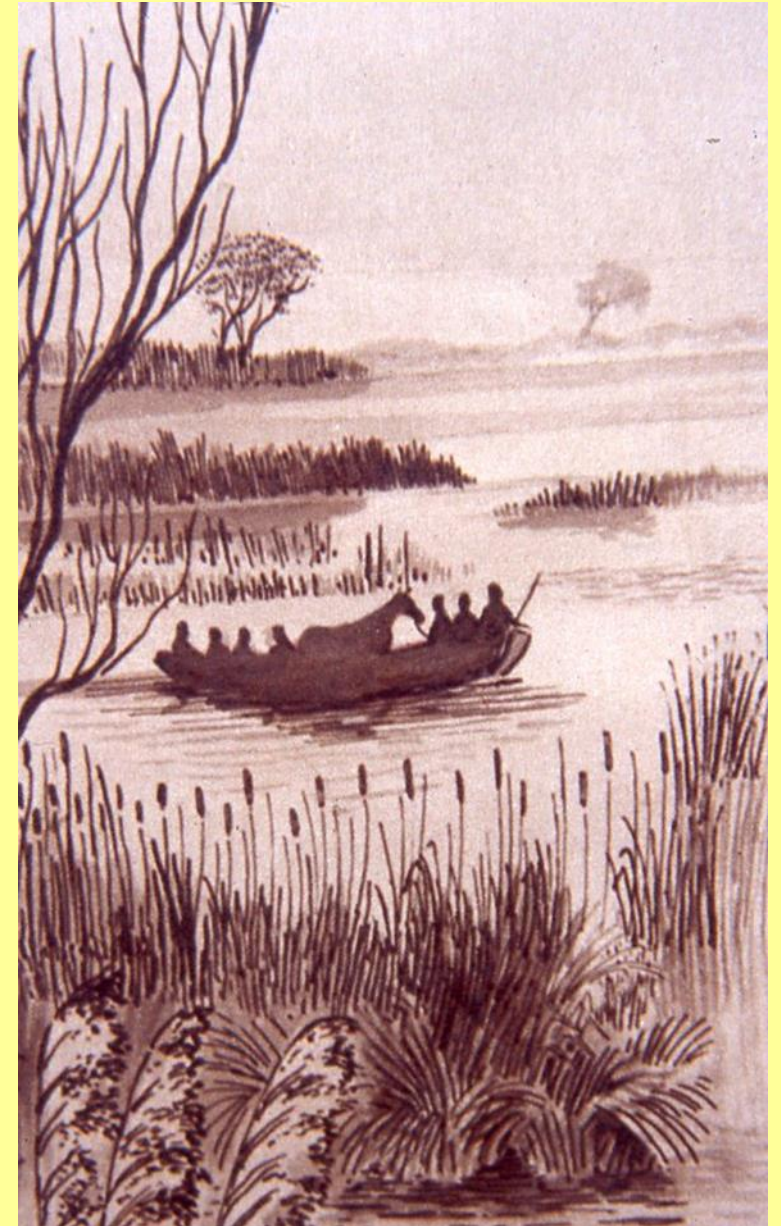


There was further fighting in 1258 when Barons tried to seize power from **Henry III**; after confiscation of their land.

Many disinherited barons turned to Ely & occupied & plundered it.

Royalists tried to blockade the Isle, attempted an assault by water & entered during dry summer. The King ordered the church at Ely to seize entrances to Isle and guard them from sunrise to sunset.

In 1266 a force of rebels seized the Isle and pillaged the uplands, they entered Cambridge and Norwich. In 1268 Ely was captured by Prince Edward



ELY'S ANCIENT CAUSEWAYS.

Evidence of Attacks on the Isle of Ely.

SOME INTERESTING DISCOVERIES.

By MAJOR GORDON FOWLER.

Some years ago Mr. T. C. Lethbridge, of Shelford, started to investigate the subject of William the Conqueror's attacks upon the Isle of Ely and Hereward's gallant defence, and after a while the writer joined him in his researches.

Not being prepared to accept modern versions of the story without reference to their original sources, we studied transcripts of the "De Gestis Herwardi Saxonis," a 13th Century manuscript, which appears to be a copy of an early 12th Century one, and the Historia Eliensis. Liber Secundus, written by Thomas, a monk of Ely, in about 1153. In them we found that the topographical descriptions of the events were very confusing, but not of a nature to lead us to suppose that the attacks upon the Isle must have taken place opposite Aldreth.

A series of excavations carried out by Mr. Lethbridge on various parts of the Aldreth causeway and investigations into the nature of objects that have been found in the river there in days gone by produced no evidence to support the view that Aldreth was the site of the battles. The large earthwork on the south side of Aldreth causeway, so often called

"WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR FORT," was photographed from an aeroplane, and

A

The large earthwork on the south side of Aldreth causeway, so often called

"WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR FORT," was photographed from an aeroplane, and appears to be an Iron Age fortification, that is to say, more than a thousand years older than the Norman conquest.

It would take too long to repeat our reasons for looking for causeways on the east side of the Isle, but let us say that we expected to find one thereabouts, and especially in the neighbourhood of Barway and the east, and Little Thetford and the west of the river. First we investigated the remains of a causeway between Quaveney and the north side, what was a hill on the present site of Roswell-pitts, but it had been submerged during the last 20 years that we were there. On the other side we recovered iron weapons of the Conquest not many miles from where that causeway had been interrupted by the bed of the extinct course of the main river. We investigated the remains of a causeway between the Old Market at Stuntney and Babylon, but the remains of it were too scanty to give any exact information, because it has been

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for many years past. Our excavations there were fruitless. However, we found that both these ancient causeways had been made with the help of either whole or split in right through the peat and blue clay beneath it. They have come up from time to time with the level of the land due to drainage, and their tops near the surface suffered with its cultivation. In the market, the writer Randall, of Barway, if he had any piles in his land between his cottage on the river bank and Thetford Ferry and the bank. He said he had in a corner of the west and in the drainage of the centre field of the Isle lie between the river and the bank there. Mr. Lethbridge was with them, and at Little Thetford covered an artificial haugh of the river, made of gravel and decayed brushwood, and a trial trench in the land

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nature of this causeway are available. No doubt, the other two causeways already mentioned were of similar construction.



Mr. Randall has dug up the causeway over the full width of the field already referred to. It is about 15 to 18 feet wide and runs on a line between the north side of Seven Stars cottage and the south side of Mr. Markham's Fordy Farm building.

An account Ely's Ancient Causeways was published by Major Gordon Fowler in the Ely Standard on 23rd March 1934

Postscript

In the 1600s the Fens around Ely were again the scene of battles.

There were conflicts over proposals to drain the Fens with the digging of a new Bedford River from Earith to take the waters of the Great Ouse more quickly to the sea. Once this scheme had been completed, and seen to fail, there came proposals for a newer, larger Bedford River alongside it – a scheme that used Scottish Prisoners-of-War as a labour force with Cornelius Vermuyden as its principal engineer.

Between the two projects came another Civil War, this time between ***King Charles I*** and Parliament, chief amidst whom was fenland MP, ***Oliver Cromwell***.

Once again the Islands of Ely became crucial, whichever side held them could control a large areas between Cambridge and the Sea.

Once again islands were garrisoned and attacks launched and all the issues that had confronted earlier protagonists surfaced once more



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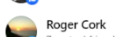
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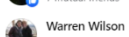
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